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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a teaching method based on generative transformational grammar that has been successfully used in the ESL (English as a second language) classroom. The method and techniques are based on the Elgin-Rush study in which the problem of teaching basic writing skills to native English speakers was addressed. The present study addresses an extension of the use of the Elgin-Rush method to the teaching of grammar to intermediate ESL students. The method's underlying principles are to teach grammar by presenting the student with language data structured so as to isolate and illustrate one grammatical principle, and then to have the student formulate a rule that explains the data. The student will thus acquire more meaningful control of the grammatical rules of English, i.e. closer to the level of native competency. The 18 Algerian students involved in this study at San Diego State University were studying English to achieve high scores on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). The contrastive analysis technique was found most useful when used to illustrate only a specific presuppositional difference between the two languages. Four areas were chosen for grammar lessons: (1) the presuppositions of English verb combinations; (2) the presuppositions involved in complement choice in English; (3) the subordinating mechanisms of English other than use of complements; and (4) the function of prepositions in Engish. The ten exercises developed during the study are described, and samples are presented. (EJS)

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THE APPLICATION OF A NEW METHOD IN TEACHING ESL

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This study was concerned with the development of curriculum material, based on generative transformational grammar, for use in teaching ESL (English as a Second Language). There seems to be much controversy at this time as to how linguistics theory can best be applied to language teaching. This controversy will not be taken up here; rather, a teaching method which is firmly based in linguistics theory, and which has been successfully used in the ESL classroom, will be described. It is not suggested that the effectiveness of the method has been conclusively proven in this study, since it did not take place under controlled experimental conditions. However, one would hope that further experiments will be undertaken in order to provide such evidence. It does seem that there is great potential for the development of effective, theoretically sound ESL textbooks and teaching aids, using the techniques which will be described below.

The method and techniques which were used in this study are based on research done at San Diego State University (Elgin, Rush 1976). In the Elgin-Rush study, the problem of teaching basic writing skills to native English speakers was addressed. It was found that the grammar which has been internalized by the native speaker can be brought to conscious awareness by inductive reasoning and then successfully used to improve the student's writing. The method involved the presentation of language data chosen to illustrate a particular grammar principle. The student was asked to examine the data and formulate a rule which would explain it. In this way native intuitions were used to inductively formulate language hypotheses which would help the speaker to be more aware of his/her performance errors. Statistical analysis of the results of this experiment showed the method (hereafter called the Elgin method) to be successful when compared with conventional teaching methods, in helping the "remedial" English student to improve his/her writing skills. (The reader is referred to the original study (Elgin, Rush 1976) for a description of the experimental design and of the results obtained.)

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The present study addressed an extension of the use of the Elgin method to the teaching of grammar to intermediate ESL students. The method had to be somewhat modified for use with non-native speakers, but the underlying principles remained the same; i.e. to teach grammar by presenting the student with language data structured in such a way as to isolate and illustrate one grammatical principle, and then to have the student formulate a rule which will explain that data. The hypothesis is that in this way the student will acquire a more meaningful control of the grammatical rules of English, closer to the level of native competency. One also hopes to find that the student will develop analytical skills closer to the natural skills of the child, which will aid him or her in acquiring the second language.

A slightly different version of this paper was presented at the CATESOL State Conference in San Diego, 1977.

Description of the Study

This study took place in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Applied Linguistics Certificate Program offered through the linguistics department at San Diego State University. The students involved in the study were a group of eighteen Algerian students, studying English in order to achieve high scores on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), which would permit them to study business administration at an American university at the graduate level. These students were part of the American Language and Culture Program offered through the College of Extended Studies at San Diego State University. Their English language course consisted of approximately thirty hours per week of traditional ESL instruction supplemented by several hours weekly of individual tutoring. The students were to be prepared for the English structures which they would soon encounter on the TOEFL and in their graduate studies. Course planning was constrained by the specific goals of these students and by the urgency of their situation.

During the first month of the semester three students were tutored on an individual basis. This was the first phase of the study. Each week the students were presented with a grammar exercise designed to supplement their regular class work. The exercises were based on the Elgin method and were structured as follows:

1 - Information was given which was necessary to the student's understanding of the problem.

2 - Data were provided which were carefully chosen in order not to mislead the student. Both grammatical and ungrammatical examples were provided, with the ungrammatical sentences marked as such.

3 - Questions were asked which would lead to the formulation of a correct hypothesis or rule to account for the given data.

During this phase of the project the exercises were tailored to the individual needs of the three students involved; therefore, the exercises encompassed a narrow range of English structure, dealing only with problems related to the verb presuppositions.[1] In these early exercises some techniques of contrastice analysis were used. For example, a non-grammatical English structure would be juxtaposed to its grammatical French equivalent and vice-versa, in order to highlight areas of presuppositional difference between the two languages.

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1 Presupposition is defined here as everything that a native speaker knows when looking at a language sequence which is not overtly present in the surface structure of that sequence. This definition of presupposition is one proposed by Dr. Suzette Elgin. While realizing that this is not the commonly accepted definition in theoretical linguistics, it seems to be a more pedagogically useful definition and thus more suited to my purpose here.

For example:

Figure 1

1 - Je suis ici depuis hier.	*1 - I am here since yesterday.
*2 - J'ai été ici depuis hier.	2 - I have been here since yesterday.
*3 - Il a habité ici depuis longtemps.	3 - He has lived here for a long time.
4 - Il habite ici depuis longtemps.	*4 - He lives here for a long time.

The students involved reacted positively toward this new type of grammar presentation and seemed to show improvement in their grasp of English structure. Some problems were noted, however, with the contrastive analysis techniques used.

The technique apparently became confusing to the students when it was used to excess. It was therefore concluded that the technique was most useful when used sparingly and very carefully, to illustrate a specific presuppositional difference between the two languages as in Figure 1 above.

During the second phase of the project, two classes (each composed of six students) were used in order to further test this teaching method in a regular classroom environment. These students were taken from the group of Algerian students earlier described. Each class met two hours weekly for a period of six weeks. These classes were structured much differently than a traditional grammar class. The instructor gave no lectures; the students memorized no rules. Rather, the students were presented with grammar problems which they attempted to solve during the class period. The instructor was present in order to answer individual questions. At the end of the class there was a short discussion period during which the students could talk about the grammar problem. This period proved very beneficial, as the students usually provided additional illustrative examples of the grammar principle which they had just discovered. In this way they continued to internalize the principle. At the close of many class sessions, a handout was presented to the students which reviewed the lesson in detail, providing still more examples of the grammar principle at work.

Four areas of concentration were chosen for these grammar lessons. They were as follows:

1 - The presuppositions of English verb combinations;

2 - The presuppositions involved in complement[2] choice in English;

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1 Asterisks indicate ungrammatical constructions.

2 A complement is defined as a sentence which is embedded as subject or object of another sentence. There are several different markers or complementizers used in English (ie: for... to, possessive +ing, etc.) The choice of which complementizer should be used in a sentence of this nature is determined by the specific predicate used in the main clause.

3 - The subordinating mechanisms of English (other than use of complements);

4 - The function of prepositions in English.

These four areas were chosen as a result of a thorough examination of sample TOEFL questions. It seemed that the TOEFL emphasized these four types of English structures. Realizing the goals of this course, the lessons were planned around these four areas of emphasis. Exercises were developed to deal with each area and were presented weekly to the class in the manner described above.

Description of Each Exercise

There were a total of ten exercises developed during this study. Each of these will be discussed as to its purpose and as to how it could be improved. Samples from the set of exercises are attached to this paper for reference.

Exercises One and Two were used during the first phase of the project. They dealt with the verb presuppositions contrasted between French and English. In these exercises the student was asked to:

1 - Examine the data;

2 - Mark the ungrammatical French sentences with an asterisk;

3 - Answer a set of questions dealing with the data.

The purpose of Exercise One was to illustrate the usage of the so-called "present tense" in English and to illustrate various differences between English and French in usage of this tense. The purpose of Exercise Two was to examine the presuppositions involved in the past tense in both English and French and to examine differences between the two languages in its usage. Both of these exercises were well-received by the students and seemed enlightening to them. A weakness in Exercise One was the lack of interesting vocabulary and context in the sentences proveded as data. An attempt was made to correct this weakness in the exercises which followed.

Exercise Three was used in the second phase of the program. The purpose of this exercise was to illustrate verb presupposition differences in several verb tenses of French and English. The greatest problem with this exercise was its overuse of the French language for the contrastive purposes. Because of the variety of language background in the class, many of the students had trouble identifying ungrammatical sentences in French. Although most of the students could be described as having native competency in French, others of the students had acquired French as a second language and showed considerably lower proficiency. Because of this lower proficiency in French, these students were confused rather than aided by the use of contrastive analysis in the exercises. Furthermore, they were embarrassed to be found weak in the French language, thus leading to a lack of participation on their part. In the future I would not assume native competency in any given language for students in a class of this nature, but would construct exercises more generally applicable.

The next three exercises (Exercises Four, Five, and Six) were developed by Dr. Elgin at my request, for use in the program. These exercises focused on auxiliary usage. As can be seen, the French language is used only occasionally in these exercises, and the note is made that the student should use his/her native lnaguage (not necessarily French) for contrastive purposes. This was a very effective way of dealing with the sociolinguistic problems which had developed in the class regarding the use of the French language. A handout accompanied these exercises, dealing with the semantic characteristics of modal auxiliaries which prompted lively discussion.

The next exercise, Exercise Seven, dealt with complement choice in English. The purpose of this exercise was to illustrate that complement choice is often determined by the semantic class of the main verb. The students were asked to divide verbs into groups according to the complements accepted and then to generalize as to the semantic nature of these verbs. One problem found with this exercise was that the students had difficulty understanding what was meant by "classes of verbs." This problem was resolved during the discussion period. In the future, I would try to be more explicit as to what is meant by semantic class in my exercise and to include more examples.

Exercise Eight was actually an expansion of Exercise Seven. In Exercise Eight-A, the student was intended to recognize that sentences can be combined in several manners and that generally a marker must be present to signal that combination. Examples were given of both complements and of relative constructions. In Exercise Eight-B, three types of embedding mechanisms were illustrated and students were asked to find the functional relationship of the embedded sentence to the main predicate. A handout (taken from Elgin, The Joy of English Grammar) was given at the end of lesson Eight; it reviewed the material which had been presented in the exercises. A weakness of this lesson was that a great deal of material was presented at once and some students were bewildered by the quantity of data. A solution for this problem would be to have shorter lessons with more time given to each grammar principle.

Exercise Nine dealt with the case categories of English. The exercise was again divided into two parts. In Exercise Nine-A, the student was to realize that all noun phrases have a function in a sentence and to note some ways in which this function can be marked; specifically by word order and by the use of prepositions. In exercise Nine-B, the student is to recognize that question words stand for noun phrases of a particular case. A handout was given at the end of this lesson to review the material which had been covered in this group of exercises. This lesson had the same shortcomings as were discussed above for Lesson Eight.

These problems resulted from the general lack of time in the course discussed earlier. The students found this exercise particularly interesting, however, as it seemed a novel and logical explanation of prepositions.

As for the specific evaluation measures used in the class, two quizzes were given, a sample of which will be found attached to this paper for reference. A format was as follows:

1 - The student was given a question followed by several responses, one of which was grammatical. The student was to choose the grammatical response;

2 - The student was also given brief questions to be answered.

In the second task above, the students were graded on correctness of structure. If there was one structural error, the entire response was graded as incorrect. Ten students took the final quiz and their scores were distributed as follows:

Figure 2

Number of total responses asked for = 20
Mean number of errors per student = 1.4

#Errors	#Students
0	1
1	5
2	3
3	1

It should be noted that all students involved in this program succeeded in achieving the TOEFL scores necessary for entrance into graduate study.

Conclusion

In this study, the Elgin method, although designed initially for use with native speakers, was found to be easily applicable to second language instruction. It seems to offer an excellent potential for good results when used in the ESL classroom as described. One of the most important factors to be considered when using this method is that by its very nature it causes the student to inductively form hypotheses to explain the observable data provided by the second language. This process is much closer to what we know of the natural way in which the first language is acquired than are many traditional techniques. The Elgin method thus seems to aid the speaker in developing competence in the second language.

One other factor which should be mentioned in connection with the use of this method in the classroom is the need for variety in class activities. Students need variety in any language class, as has been noted by many authorities in the field of second language acquistition. When using these exercises, one should be careful to include time for discussion and oral exercise alternated with the written activity. In this situation, the grammar lesson is welcomed and seen as an adventure, a puzzle to be solved, rather than as a set of rules and paradigms to be dreaded.

After this preliminary effort at developing ESL material, one is struck by the need for more research in the field. The Elgin method seems to be a very practical classroom technique, one that lends itself to second language instruction, and one that certainly deserves further development. One would hope that research will be carried on in this direction as soon as possible, for the need is certainly present in our ESL and other second language instruction programs.[3]

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3 Some research in this area is presently being conducted by Ronald Feare through the linguistics department at San Diego State University.

SAMPLE EXERCISES

The examples given here are not meant to represent complete exercises. Each sample exercise has been shortened considerably for my purposes here. In an actual classroom situation much more data should be presented in order to clearly illustrate the grammatical concept being dealt with.

1) Exercises One, Two, and Three dealt with the verb presuppositions contrasted between French and English.

EXERCISE #1

1. Look at all the English verbs. What VERB TENSE are they in? What TIME does each one represent?

2. What does a present tense verb normally mean in French? In English?

ENGLISH SENTENCES

1. I leave at 3:00 tomorrow.
2. *He leaves yesterday at noon.
3. She usually eats at 12:30.
4. My mother goes to the market every week.
5. *I paint the house last year.
6. When I go to New York, I will see the Statue of Liberty.
7. *When I will see you tomorrow, I will tell you the news.
8. Gold is a precious metal.

FRENCH SENTENCES

1. Je pars à trois heures demain.
2. *Il part hier à midi.
3. Elle mange d'habitude à 12:30.
4. Ma mère va toutes les semaines au marché.
5. *Je peint la maison l'année dernière.

6. *Quand je vais à New York, je verrai la statue de la liberté.
7. Quand je te verrai demain, je te raconterai les nouvelles.
8. L'or est un metal précieux.

2) Exercises Four, Five, and Six focused on auxiliary usage.

EXERCISE #5

1. Your order will be ready by noon.
2. The accountant does not speak Arabic.
3. *My assistant balanced not the books.
4. Your order will not be ready by noon.
5. The jet took off just before you arrived.
6. My assistant did not balance the books.
7. *Your order will be not ready by noon.
8. That form must be turned in before the 15th.
9. *Your order not will be ready by noon.
10. The firm should not accept such a low price.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER:

1. What is the rule for the formation of a simple negative sentence of English?

2. In what way does this differ from the rule for the formation of a simple negative sentence in your native language?

3) Exercised Seven and Eight A and B dealt with subordinating mechanisms of English.

EXERCISE 8-A

DATA

1. *Who the executive spoke at the conference this morning seemed very astute.
2. The professor who lectures so dogmatically annoys me.
3. *The man wanted for to leave.
4. The economists expected for prices to go down.
5. The man wanted to leave.
6. The executive who spoke at the conference this morning seemed very astute.
7. *John is consistently late upsets the director.
8. *The man wanted for himself to leave.
9. *The economists expected prices to go down.
10. *The professor lectures so dogmatically annoys me.
11. That the professor lectures so dogmatically annoys me.
12. For John to be consistently late upsets the director.
13. It upsets the director for John to be consistently late.
14. The economists expected that prices would go down.
15. The man wanted for the man to leave.

16. *It upsets the director John to be consistently late.
17. John's being consistently late upsets the director.
18. *The executive spoke at the conference this morning very astute who.
19. *The professor lectures who so dogmatically annoys me.
20. *The economists expected prices would go down that.

QUESTIONS:

1. How are #7, #9, and #10 similar? Do you find these sentences easy to understand?
2. How are #18, #19, and #20 similar? Do you find these sentences easy to understand?
3. When could #15 be a correct sentence? Compare it to #5. What do these two sentences have in common?
4. What do #4 and #5 have in common? How are they different?
5. All of the above sentences have a basic similarity. What is it?
6. What is the basic rule for the formation of such sentences?

4) Exercises 9 A and B dealt with the case categories of English.

EXERCISE 9-B

DATA

1. Why aren't you going to work?
   a. I'm staying home because I'm sick.
   b. *I'm staying home where I'm sick.
   c. *I'm staying sickly home.

2. When does the mailman come?
   a. *He comes in 11:00.
   b. He comes at 11:00.
   c. *He comes with 11:00.

3. Where is the dossier I prepared yesterday?
   a. *It is with the office.
   b. It is on the table.
   c. *It was prepared in a hasty manner.

QUESTIONS:

There are question words which correspond to the set of English cases. Look at the following sentences. What is the question word which would elicit each of the underlined noun phrases?

She	went	to the theater	with a friend	on Saturday, May 12.
1		2	3	4

1.
2.
3.
4.

The car hit a tree with the bumper.
1 2 3

1.
2.
3.

5) Format for quizzes.

QUIZ

I. Select the best response for each question.

1. What are you writing?
   a. I'm writing a letter to my colleague, Mr. Jones.
   b. I'm writing to a letter my colleague, Mr. Jones.
   c. I'm writing a letter my colleague, Mr. Jones.

2. Why is the director upset?
   a. It upsets the director for John to be late.
   b. It upsets the director for John be late.
   c. It upsets the director for to be late.

II. Answer the following questions with complete sentences.

1. Which classes will you be taking this fall?

2. Whose car will you borrow to go to the beach this weekend?